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Early School Leavers in Northern Alberta

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A Background Summary

Prepared For
The Northern Alberta
Development Council

By HLA Consultants

February, 1984



Alberta
NORTHERN ALBERTA
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

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February, 1984

Educator:

This workshop report is a summary of the major report on Early School Leavers which is currently being prepared. It contains a brief description of the study background, the rationale, the methodology and the study findings. The major section of this report is the presentation of programs aimed at mitigating against early school leaving.

Throughout the course of this project, the approach we have used is one of dialogue with educators. We have maximized the direct input of educators throughout Northern Alberta. Since this study is ultimately for your use, it was considered important to include you as an integral part of the study process.

In keeping with this philosophy, your input at this workshop is essential for us to finalize the final report, and particularly, the programs for which you will be ultimately responsible.

We look forward to your participation and thank you for your involvement.

Sincerely,

HLA CONSULTANTS



Roger Lefrancois
Principal

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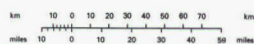
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NORTHERN ALBERTA DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL AREA

COMMUNITIES WITH POPULATION OVER 75 (1981 CANADA CENSUS)



— PRIMARY HIGHWAY — SECONDARY ROAD — RAILWAY

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I STUDY SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

"If I knew then what I know now,
I would have never left school"

Early School Leaver
Fort McMurray, Alberta
October 21, 1983

The education of the individual is an acknowledged cornerstone in democratic society. Governments provide a wide range of educational facilities and programming in order to insure an informed citizenry. While participation in the system is required, the education process itself is liberal. It embraces precepts aimed at maximizing individual potential, stimulating intellectual curiosity and providing for the acquisition of skills necessary in the workplace. Therefore, when an individual opts out of the school society there is cause for concern, both in the school and the community. This study subscribes to the philosophy that early school leaving has a generally negative impact on the individual leaver, the school and the larger society.

1.2 Background

Early school leaving has been an educational concern for many years. Researchers in Canada and the United States first emphasized the problem in the late 1940's and early 1950's. In an early study in Alberta, Hohol (1955) identified eight factors associated with school leavers. He reported on a number of predictive approaches which could identify pupils who were vulnerable, and indicated that the development of a uniform system of pupil accounting was a prime requisite for further study of the school dropout. It is interesting to note that almost thirty years later, most of the factors identified by Hohol are discussed in the current literature, while the need for accurate record keeping, measurement, and monitoring of the dropout problem persists.

Since that time the problem of the early school leaver has increased in both magnitude and the subsequent impact on the community. During the late 1970's and early 1980's, a series of socio-educational studies commissioned by the Northern Alberta Development Council (N.A.D.C.) identified early school leaving as an important educational concern. However, although there has been a good deal of conjecture, the extent of the problem and its etiology were unknown. The lack of available information and the concern of northern Albertans regarding the early school leaver eventually led to the commissioning of this study.

1.3 The Social and Economic Impact of School Leaving

The decision to leave high school before completing diploma requirements is a serious one. The decision will have profound effects on the individual's personal attainment as well as his contribution to society. Early school leavers experience a higher unemployment rate, lower levels of earnings, a higher rate of juvenile delinquency and crime, and a greater need for public assistance of all types (Jones, 1977; Schreiber, 1967; Maureir, 1982; Kaplan and Luck, 1977; Howard and Andersen, 1978).

When these individuals leave school, their ability to function as independent, productive members of society is extremely limited. The dropout becomes a concern of the government and his community rather than just the school. Unemployment is the primary issue which the dropout presents to the larger society. Cyclic bouts of short and long term unemployment have a major impact on social services as well as the community. The dropout's position is rather tenuous; he is underskilled in a rapidly advancing technological society where the range of available jobs steadily shrinks. Also the dropout is young, socially immature, and generally unable to access the limited unskilled jobs which are available. Dropouts may react with anger concerning their dashed hopes for employment, or frustration in dealing with unskilled menial jobs offering little security and no opportunity for advancement. School problems may eventually become redefined as family or personal problems. Potential social costs include low self-esteem, lack of fulfilment, and feelings of alienation from the mainstream culture.

The review of the literature, Canada Employment and Immigration initiatives, and the results of the current study demonstrate that the unemployment rate is higher for school dropouts.

Because the dropout incidence tends to be higher among certain racial groups such as natives, and among youth whose parents have been previous dropouts, there are other societal implications. Racial inequalities are perpetuated and the disparities between societies "haves" and "have nots" are maintained and perhaps increased.

However, there will continue to be isolated instances where early school leaving will be of benefit to the individual and his community. Movement into family-owned enterprises, service, lumbering and agriculture will continue to be available to the early leaver in Alberta, but with fewer openings than in the past due to new technological advances which call for higher levels of skill and ability.

Numerous studies have investigated the effects of early school leaving on the individual and society. One comprehensive study (see Jones, 1977) which focussed on males in the U.S. who had left school during 1969 estimated the following costs:

- \$237 billion in lost revenue to the men;
- \$ 71 billion in foregone revenue to the government;
- \$ 3 billion per year in welfare expenditure.

1981 Census data can be used to obtain some basic insights into the effects of early school leaving in northern Alberta. Even when accounting for the younger age-group profile in the N.A.D.C. area compared to that for the province as a whole, the level of schooling is lower in northern Alberta and a greater proportion of the population has less than grade 9.

Unemployment rates in Census Divisions 12 and 15 are higher than the provincial average for both males and females. The unemployment rates in both

northern Alberta and the province as a whole are higher among those who leave school prior to graduation than among those who complete school. Unemployment tends to be higher among dropouts in the north than in the province as a whole. Labour force participation rates are also lower for the leavers than for the graduates, likely resulting from the greater difficulty in finding employment, and reflecting a significant amount of hidden employment.

Average family income in northern Alberta is lower than the provincial average. Average family income is related to level of schooling, with higher levels of schooling reflecting greater income.

The census data thus tends to support higher unemployment and lower incomes among early school leavers in northern Alberta.

1.4 Characteristics of Early School Leavers

The current review of literature delineates the following factors as the most powerful predictors of the early school leaver:

- lower socio-economic background;
- early failure in school;
- academic underachievement and poor performance;
- high levels of absenteeism;
- low self-concept and achievement motivation;
- low family encouragement, especially with respect to educational and job aspirations;
- trouble with school authorities and discipline problems; and
- lack of participation in extra-curricular activities.

Most educators would agree that the influence of the home is a critical factor in the early school leaving issue. The review of the literature supports this long held contention. A number of family variables have been related to high levels of school leaving:

- low socio-economic status;
- minority membership;

- "family tradition" of sibling leavers;
- mothers and fathers with low education levels;
- limited study space;
- financial need;
- family size; and
- home stability (Zamanzadeh and Prince, 1978).

Most leavers have negative attitudes towards school (Poole, 1978; Thornburg, 1975) and do not participate in extra-curricular activities (Cervantes, 1965; Howard and Andersen, 1978; and Young and Reich, 1974). Alcohol and drug abuse among early leavers appears to be greater than that of stayers (Annis and Watson, 1979; Zamanzadeh and Prince, 1978).

Tardiness and absenteeism have been established as primary indicators of the "at risk" student and school leavers (Cervantes, 1965). Academic achievement is also highly correlated to early school leaving; a significant proportion of early school leavers are classified as underachievers. Schreiber (1964) estimated that 50% of early school leavers have been retained in a grade at least once, and if a student fails grades 1 or 2 there is an 80% chance he will not graduate.

The attitudes of educators and peer group pressure can influence a student's decision to remain in or leave school. The attitudes of white middle class teachers towards ethnic minorities can exacerbate the dropout rate among students (Hunt and Clawson, 1975). Teachers who are committed, understand the problem and care for the student with a positive attitude are best equipped to deal with the "at risk" student. Elliot, Voss and Wendling (1966) state that the attitudes and actions of teachers as well as peer group pressure are of greater significance in the student's decision than the presence or absence of parental support for continuing in school.

In many cases the leaver is reacting, escaping from the reality of a disagreeable society to one which may be erroneously perceived as agreeable.

The reactive nature of the decision making process can be seen in the reasons offered by early leavers:

- dislike of school;
- lack of relevant course work;
- inability to cope;
- peer group pressure; and
- rebellion against authority (Poole, 1978; Young and Reich, 1974).

1.5 The Problem

The calculation of early school leaving tends to vary from study to study, making the comparison of findings difficult. In Alberta the dropout rate for all schools is considered to be approximately 15% - 20% per year. Scragg (1968), in a longitudinal study of all grade 9 students in Alberta reported 40% left school before graduation. Indian students in Northland School Division were estimated to leave school at a rate of 97.7% by grade 12 (McCarthy, 1971), and in another study of Alberta Indian students who were followed from grade 1, 80% had left school by grade 11 (Saigaonkai, 1975).

In a recent study of school leavers in Saskatchewan, Pawlovich (1983) reported an average leaver rate of 15% for all schools in the province.

In New York City, the school systems Chancellor recently called dropout rates of 60% for Hispanic and 54% for Blacks a "disaster" (Gannet New Service, 1983).

1.6 Purpose and Philosophy of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the early school leaver situation in northern Alberta, and develop practical mitigative measures based on direct field information and documentation. While a literature review is included for clarity and background, the emphasis is on future action programs rather than a restatement of the problem.

The study is "hands on", consisting of an extensive field program and close working relationship with all of the school districts involved in the study. Individual interaction with students in school, former students who dropped out,

parents, teachers, administrators, local community organizations, agencies and other provincial organizations which have an abiding interest in education, forms the essential information base. It is primarily from this base that programs are developed.

Very early in the study the philosophy of involvement was clearly communicated to the educational community. Students, educators and others are encouraged to participate in the study. This is a northern study, conducted with northern Albertans for implementation in their schools and communities.

The culmination of the study is the development of programs designed to remediate the identified situation. These programs are directly linked to causal factors identified in the study. They are being discussed with educators, those responsible for their implementation, and thus the final programs will be identified as being potentially effective and directly implementable.

The Northern Alberta Development Council (N.A.D.C.) is a Council funded by the Alberta government and chaired by the Member of the Legislature for Lac La Biche/McMurray. Located in Peace River, Alberta, the Council monitors developments in the north, develops initiatives and programs and co-ordinates research efforts. A Council Steering Committee was selected for this project to represent educators throughout the north as well as government departments having an interest and responsibility for northern education. It is this committee which works closely with the project director and researchers in reviewing progress, providing input and in approving the sequential steps in the study. Acceptance of the final report also comes from this representative body.

1.6.1 Objectives

The objectives of the study incorporate the philosophy and terms of reference developed by the N.A.D.C. and the researchers. The main objectives of this project are:

- i) to examine the situation of the early leaver in northern Alberta;
- ii) to establish the extent of the early school leaver problem in northern Alberta;

- iii) to develop and recommend a monitoring system which will enable students to be traced in their movements from one school to another and at the point of dropping out; and
- iv) to develop and recommend practical and realistic mitigative measures to reduce the incidence of early school leavers.

The secondary objectives are detailed specific content and process components which are incorporated to insure satisfactory completion of the main objectives.

1.6.2 Content Objectives

- i) to review previous studies on the early leaver with an emphasis on Alberta, the North, Canada and then other countries;
- ii) to develop a profile of the early school leaver;
- iii) to determine the contributing factors to early school leaving that are both internal to the school system and external to it;
- iv) to determine the effects of the early school leaver on the north; and
- v) to examine the effects that specifically defined internal and external factors have upon early school leaving.

1.6.3 Process Objectives

- i) to obtain general school information and specific school leaver information from all school jurisdictions in the N.A.D.C. area;
- ii) to conduct in-depth personal interviews in six sample districts with six groups including students, educators and community members;
- iii) to establish a clear linkage between the causes of early school leaving and the recommended solutions;
- iv) to create a working atmosphere of dialogue and openness with the participating school jurisdictions; and
- v) to organize and present workshops and conferences that have as their objective the sharing of ideas and testing the practicality of the recommended solutions.

1.7 Methodology

The design of the study required considerable planning and co-ordination between the consultant, the project director and the steering committee. The committee drew up terms of reference, which delineated the parameters of the study and identified specific research topics that were to be addressed. These terms served as the guiding document used by the consultants in developing the proposal. The methodology proposed was reviewed by the committee and approved.

In keeping with the commitment for educator involvement, communication with northern school districts was initiated at the outset of the study. Information concerning the early school leaver is being sought through workshops, individual interviews, conferences and impromptu discussions.

During the field study, educators are being asked for programs which had worked in their schools; for ideas which could be developed into programs; about the relevance of programs developed elsewhere; and finally for input pertaining to the programs developed in the present study. They are being asked, "Is this program practical, is it relevant for your district, can it be implemented and what are the chances of its success?"

Prior to the field work Early School Leaver Workshops were conducted in five northern Alberta communities. These workshops launched the beginning of the data collection process and focussed attention on the early school leaver issue. The workshops were designed for educators and presented a current review of the literature, remediation programs and reference materials. The purpose of the workshops was to allow educators to share ideas and concerns. It also provided the opportunity to discuss the study and the information requirements from the participants' home school districts. It was in one of these information sharing sessions that the final definition of the early school leaver was decided upon.

1.7.1 Definition: The Early School Leaver

For the purpose of data collection it was decided to accept the following

definition of the early school leaver:

"A student not enrolled in a post-secondary education institution, academic upgrading, correspondence or apprenticeship program, who leaves school before completing the minimum requirements for a grade 12 diploma."

Dropouts also include students who interrupted their studies. In other words a student who dropped out of grade 9 for one year and then returned is considered a dropout. Similarly a student who drops out of high school and does not immediately enroll in another education institution is considered a dropout.

1.7.2 General Information Format

An information format, to be self-administered by all schools with a grade level of 7 or more, was designed to obtain specific enrollment and program information on each of these schools. It also requested specific information on each of the early school leavers who could be identified for the school years 80-81, 81-82, 82-83.

1.7.3 In-Depth Interviews

Since this is largely a landmark study, a strong focus was put on primary data collection. In-depth interviews were conducted to obtain detailed information about school leavers from various sources. To standardize the data collection, the following questionnaires were designed for personal interview:

- i) school leavers;
- ii) stayers and high risk students;
- iii) parents of leavers;
- iv) school administrators and staff; and
- v) community organizations and agencies.

The questionnaires were initially designed by the consultant. They were then pre-tested in a K to 12 school in the study area, reviewed in considerable detail by the steering committee members, pretested and reviewed again and finalized.

1.7.4 Six Sample School Districts

Six school districts were selected for in-depth study. They provided a representative sample of the communities and school districts in northern Alberta. Individual interviews, using the questionnaire format were conducted in 16 schools and communities located within the six jurisdictions. The interviews varied in length, generally lasting 40 to 90 minutes, and confidentiality of information was assured.

The following approximate number of interviews were conducted:

school leavers	125
stayers and high risk	102
parents	35
community organizations	13
teachers and administrators	55

In addition to the above data collection, interviews were held with others who have an interest and a function in education. These were all from central agencies in Edmonton.

1.7.5 Data Analysis

All of the interview data and information obtained from the schools was coded to a computer format and the data entered in separate files. Simple frequencies and cross-tabulations were run for each of the files. In addition, factor and regression analysis were used to analyze the combined data files.

The major areas of analysis, as identified in the table of contents and described in the following text, include the following:

- i) historical documentation of the situation over the last three years;
- ii) key factors that relate to the early school leaver;
- iii) profile of the early leaver;
- iv) factors that influence early leaving that are internal to the school system;

- v) factors that influence early leaving that are external to the school system; and
- vi) effects of early leaving on the north.

1.7.6 Remediation Measures

All of the previous phases of the study: literature review, development of methodological design, workshops, field work, data collection and analysis are aimed at one objective - practical remediation measures. The ideas for these come from our discussions with many administrators, educators, ex-students, parents, current students and representatives of community organizations. The analysis of the tremendous amount of data gathered clearly identified contributing factors to early school leaving. From these, mitigative measures are proposed that would help the situation.

The practicality of these is a concern. To help assure that what is proposed can be realistically implemented, all of the agencies involved in key implementation roles, including educators, are being approached. Discussions center on budget implications, regulations, the general practicality of implementation and perceived effectiveness of the measures.

1.7.7 February Conferences

The February conferences were planned early in the study and are considered to be the final segment of the data collection phase. The purpose of the conferences is to provide educators from northern Alberta the opportunity to participate in formulating the conclusions arising from the research findings. Their input concerning the viability of the remediation programs generated by the study will be incorporated in the final report which will follow the conferences. The conferences are then the operational culmination of the philosophy of involvement which guided the study.

1.8 Study Results - Incidence

The workshops and interviews which were conducted during the extensive field

portion of the study provided the researchers with estimated levels of incidence concerning the school leaver. In general most of the educators felt that their dropout rates were between 10% and 15% per year at the senior high level, that they were 2% - 3% at the junior high level and virtually non-existent at the elementary level.

The data collected from the individual schools does not lend itself well to accurate measurements of early school leavers in Alberta. This is primarily because of its incompleteness. Two principal factors account for this;

- i) not all of the schools responded to the request for information;
- ii) many schools could not identify their school leavers, particular where students had left during the summer holiday. Of all of the leavers reported (n=2,700), only 12% were identified as leaving at the end of the year and this is likely very highly underestimated.

The total number of identified leavers in the northern schools contacted is 2,700 over the three year period. On the basis of the above, it would appear that the total number of dropouts identified is a gross underestimate of the actual number of students who left school early over that period.

To demonstrate the proportion of dropouts by grade level the following table demonstrates the percentage of leavers by last grade completed from the reported cases over the last three school years.

TABLE 1.1
Percentage of Leavers by Last Grade Completed

Grade Level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Total
Percentage (%)	-	-	-	1	2	5	9	14	28	24	18	100%

At first glance the above information does not appear to point to a very significant problem; 10% - 15% per year does not appear to be very high. However to appreciate the magnitude of the situation it is interesting to look at this from a different perspective. If 10% - 15% of students from the grade levels 7 to 12 drop out every year, how many students never graduate? The following calculation will show what the total dropout rate might look like under a certain set of assumptions. These are:

- i) begin with a total enrollment of 100 children spread between grades 7 to 12;
- ii) recognizing higher enrollments at lower grade levels, distribute the enrollment as follows:
Grade 7 - 20, Grade 8 - 20, Grade 9 - 20, Grade 10 - 14, Grade 11 - 13, Grade 12 - 13;
- iii) the dropout rate across all of these grade levels is 15% per year with the distribution of that 15% according to the grade dropout proportions presented in Table 1.1

These assumptions are selected to reflect a real life situation as closely as possible. If you follow all of these 100 students through to completion only 44 will finish Grade 12. In other words 56% of the students who began school dropped out prior to completion.

There is no general agreement on the magnitude of the incidence of early leavers. The data emphasize that there is a definite gap in student records; that schools do not really know what is happening to the students who don't show up or don't complete Grade 12. This points to the need for a system that will monitor students.

On the basis of the above data, the following are estimates of what the incidence of early school leaving is in northern Alberta:

- i) annual dropout rates for grades 7 to 12 are in the neighbourhood of 10% - 20%;

- ii) this annual rate varies considerably between ethnic groups and localities. The variance is estimated at between 5% and 33%;
- iii) it is estimated that at least 50% of students who begin grade 1 do not complete grade 12; with a large variance depending on individual schools and school districts.

There was agreement from the educators in northern Alberta in their concern about the level of early school leaving. The data collection and the reaction from the workshops and other discussions point strongly to the conclusion that there is a dropout problem in northern Alberta and it is significant.

There are many frustrations in dealing with the school leaver. It is easy to disguise the magnitude of the problem by accepting a 10% to 15% annual dropout rate. However when you consider that 50% or more of the students are not making it from beginning to end then the problem must be considered as severe. The problem may be viewed as failure reversal: it's not 50% of the students who are failing, its the system which is failing 50% of the students. This underlies the importance of introspection on the part of all educators and the need to develop and implement concrete programs which will reduce this extremely high rate of early school leaving.

1.9 Study Results - Description of the Early School Leaver

1.9.1 Introduction

Information on school leavers was obtained from two sources: school records of 2,700 students who left school before completing Grade 12; and in-depth interviews with a sample of 126 school leavers. Further clarification of the characteristics of the leavers was developed through comparison with school stayers and through interviews with parents and educators. The characteristics of high risk students were also evaluated, in order to suggest indicators by which potential school leavers could be identified prior to their decision to leave school.

The following characteristics of the school leaver were assessed:

- profile information;
- school history and performance;
- views on their schooling;
- the experience of leaving school; and
- reasons for leaving.

In addition, various perspectives on the school environment and school leaving were obtained from leavers, students, parents and educators, and community members.

1.9.2 School Leaver Profile

Most leavers (75%) were reported to have left school between the ages of 16 and 19 years. Students leaving before the age of 16 years were more likely to be from remote/isolated or rural locations than from urban centres. Comparisons with grade levels at the time of termination suggest that many leavers may be several years behind in their schooling before dropping out. Although native and caucasian students leave at approximately the same ages, native students tend to complete fewer grades before leaving school. About one half leave before grade 9, compared with one fifth of the caucasian students. This bears a direct relationship to differences in retention rates for the two groups.

The proportions of male and female leavers were quite comparable. Almost two thirds of leavers spoke English at home, with about one third speaking Cree or other languages.

Three quarters of the leavers had parents who had left prior to high school. Most leavers had other family members and friends who had left school; about one third of leavers indicated that most of their friends had left. Almost one third of leavers had had problems with the law.

School leavers differed from school stayers in that their parents tended to have lower education levels, fewer came from two-parent households, and more leavers had family members or friends who had left school. High risk students were fairly comparable to school leavers with regard to these characteristics.

1.9.3 School History and Performance

Early school leavers appear to have a fairly mobile school history, with many attending school in more than one centre. Most (70%) had also taken the bus at some time during their schooling.

Leavers tended to have poor school attendance, and almost three quarters were reported to be a disciplinary problem. The incidence did not differ for native and caucasian students, and discipline problems were more likely to occur in urban centres.

The school performance records indicated that a large number of school leavers were at a failing level during their last year of school; approximately one half of the students scored below 50% in language, reading, and math.

Consistent with this picture, the school leavers did not view their school performance very positively; few considered that they had done well in school.

Intelligence scores tended to be somewhat lower than average; in the sample of school leavers, almost two thirds of the sample had intelligence test scores

lower than 100, compared to a normal population proportion of 50%.

Many students did not feel very positively about their relationships with teachers. This was substantiated in the interviews with leavers' parents. The parents attributed this to problems with student and educator characteristics which blocked effective communications.

Many leavers also felt picked on at school, with other students and teachers cited as the most common instigators.

Compared to school stayers, the leavers were much more likely to have a poorer scholastic record, poorer relationships with others, and more negative perceptions of their school performance. They also appeared to have a markedly poorer rate of attendance.

The high risk student resembled the early school leaver most strongly in the area of poor school grades and a negative perception of his/her school performance. Poor attendance and poor relationships with others were also indicators of the high risk student.

1.9.4 Views About Schooling

The main reasons that the leavers liked their favourite subjects were that they did well in them, or that they found them interesting. The most commonly mentioned reason for disliking courses was that they were too hard or that the student obtained poor grades. A much smaller proportion of the school leavers and high risk students appeared to be motivated by a positive interest in their courses, compared to school stayers.

When asked about things they liked at school, 60% of the leavers mentioned the presence of friends, while sports was indicated by 44%. Friends and sports rated highly for high risk students as well, but only about one quarter of the stayers mentioned that friends were important. Most early school leavers and high risk students have friends who leave school early, and the loss of

friends may be one factor which contributes to the leavers' decision to quit school.

The most frequently mentioned dislike for the leavers and the high risk students was the teachers, followed by discipline.

1.9.5 The School Leaving Experience

Most early school leavers first thought about leaving school in Grade 9 or Grade 10. Since a large proportion of students left after these grades, it is evident that there is not a great deal of early consideration about leaving school.

For most students, leaving school was their own idea. At least three quarters of the leavers did not feel comfortable approaching school staff to discuss their plans to leave school. This appears to be a general problem, since this reticence was also expressed by school stayers and high risk students who had thought about leaving school. Of those who did talk to counsellors, teachers, or administrators, almost one half felt that the staff did not understand their position. Counsellors and teachers were likely to encourage students to stay in school.

More students (leavers, stayers, and high risk) consulted with parents or friends and found them to be understanding. Less than one half of the parents were contacted by the school at the time their child left school.

Fifty eight percent of leavers really wanted to leave school when they did; suggesting that some hesitancy was experienced by almost one half of the leavers.

At the time they left school, about one half of leavers didn't consider completing high school to be important for getting a job. This was in marked contrast to the feelings of school stayers. Almost one half of the leavers did not have any alternative plans. Two fifths of the leavers had a job when they left school, corresponding to the proportion which had had a part-time job while in school.

Of those who were identified by school staff as high risk students, most had considered leaving in the previous six months. Many of these students had decided to stay because they felt that schooling was essential for obtaining a good job, or they wanted to graduate.

1.9.6 Reason for Leaving School

There was overall agreement among school leavers, educators, and school records that lack of interest was the commonly reported reason for school leaving. However, leavers indicated that problems with teachers and administrators were just as important as lack of interest in contributing to early school leaving.

There was fairly consistent agreement among leavers, students, and parents when they were asked to rate the importance of various factors with respect to early school leaving. Factors which were each identified by over one half of these respondents included:

- teaching approaches;
- unpleasant school atmosphere;
- social factors (e.g. drugs, alcohol, pregnancy);
- no home encouragement;
- home life; and
- student not interested.

Community group members particularly stressed problems with home life and lack of home encouragement.

Analysis of the school records of 2,700 students revealed that reasons given for leaving school differed with the sex of the student, ethnicity, and rural or urban locations. Students leaving at different grade levels also offered different reasons.

These findings are summarized as follows:

- "Work" was more likely to be mentioned by males, caucasians, high school students and those in small urban centres;
- "No interest" and "Would have failed" were likely to be mentioned by males, native students, those from rural areas, and students leaving before the junior high school level;
- "Peer pressure" was more likely to be mentioned by caucasian students, and those leaving at a junior high level; and
- "Personal/family problems" were more likely to be mentioned by females.

1.10 Study Results - Perspectives on School Leaving

Most educators and community group members felt that school leaving is a significant problem in their area.

Both educators and community group members felt that the leaver could be characterized primarily as coming from a family which doesn't value education. Other features mentioned were lack of interest and ambition, poor home life, poor grades and low self-esteem.

Educators felt that they could identify potential leavers at the grade 5 to 8 levels. The factors the educators used for recognizing these students corresponded closely to actual leaver characteristics, including poor attendance, low grades, lack of interest, and discipline problems.

Parents and educators felt that large schools were too impersonal, and thus contributed to early school leaving.

Differences were evident when the views of the various interview groups about responsibility for school leaving were compared. Student groups and parents felt that the school leavers themselves were primarily responsible, with students considering teachers and administrators to be secondarily responsible.

In contrast both educators and community members placed the blame on the parents, and secondarily on the leavers themselves.

1.11 Suggested Mitigative Measures

There were numerous mitigative measures for keeping students in school which were suggested by the various interview groups.

The most frequently mentioned responses of the early school leavers were all in-school factors. These were:

- better course work;
- better teachers and teacher/student relationships;
- better school counselling of a preventative nature;
- more programs and work experience;
- better career counselling; and
- more interesting school activities.

School stayers, high risk students, and parents mentioned the following most frequently:

- more relevant courses;
- better teachers;
- more extra-curricular activities
- better teacher/student communication;
- better parent/administration communication;
- more parental involvement and encouragement.

Educators felt that the following factors would be effective in reducing the dropout rate:

At the school level:

- more vocational programs;
- alternate programs, such as life skills;
- counselling; and
- more flexibility to meet individual and local needs.

Outside the school:

- better social services and volunteer groups;
- change in community attitude to education, and social conditions.

Community group members suggested the following measures:

- more counselling;
- education program diversified and adapted to meet cultural/children's needs;
- more community involvement and adult awareness of education;
- more experienced teachers; and
- more recreation and drug control programs.

Additional courses were also suggested by the respondents. Vocational education was most consistently mentioned by all of the groups. Educators and community group members also identified life skills courses, while leavers themselves mentioned computer skills and business education. Community group members indicated the need for introducing native children into school with English as a second language program.

The majority of educators and parents supported the community vocational centre model, and mobile education facilities. Community group members appeared to favour the mobile facilities option. Other options which were suggested include K-9 or K-12 schools in all communities, or group homes run by natives. There was little support for correspondence courses, and there was considerable concern about students.

Parent and community involvement with the school was supported by parents, community group members, and teachers, who felt that this would have a positive effect on dropout rates. Various suggestions for involvement included more regular parent-teacher contacts, parent volunteers or aides, attendance at PTA meetings, and involvement of parents in social or extra-curricular activities.

Respondents were also asked to comment on the qualities of teachers. The student groups (leavers, stayers and high risk) and the parents were consistent in their description of an effective teacher. The most frequently mentioned characteristics were:

- easy going and good humoured
- explains things clearly; and
- understands/listens to children.

Community members and educators also focused on empathetic characteristics of teachers but most did not mention the qualities of good humour and clarity which were identified by students and parents.

Parents, community members and school leavers felt that an ineffective teacher didn't care, was boring, and didn't present materials well. Educators had a similar picture of the ineffective teacher as not being concerned about children, or not organized. Community group members were concerned that teachers usually leave just as they have started to become familiar with the community.

The educators identified several special or unique qualities of a northern teacher, and offered several suggestions to better prepare teachers for teaching in the north. Special qualities mentioned most frequently included:

- self-confidence, self-reliance and independence;
- accepting of other cultures; and
- commitment to the children.

Most educators interviewed had not received any special training for teaching in the north. The most frequently mentioned training considerations they suggested were to provide teachers with a realistic orientation to the situation, as well as a better exposure to northern and native culture.

1.12 Study Recommendations

The study recommendations take the form of programs that, if implemented, have the potential of reducing the incidence of early school leavers in northern Alberta. Not only would these programs reduce the incidence of early leaving, they would also generally improve the quality of education and provide the schools with a more pleasant environment for both the students and the teachers.

The fact that 50% or more of all students in northern Alberta leave school prior to completing Grade 12 is unacceptable. While recognizing that progress towards the reduction of this rate will be slow, it is hoped that these programs will have a significant impact. Many students will continue to drop out of school early. Through the implementation of some of these programs most of the early leavers will be better prepared to make choices and face their future.

The implementation and effectiveness of the recommendations will require a co-operative effort on the part of all those concerned; educators, government representatives, agencies (e.g. A.T.A., A.S.T.A.), education institutions (e.g. university, A.V.C.'s, C.V.C.'s), community agencies and organizations, parents and the students themselves.

While most of the programs are relatively inexpensive, they do not totally avoid the problem of budget considerations and priorities. Again it will require the recognition that a 50% student loss is a significant problem deserving high priority attention. The largest resource requirement will be the human energy necessary to effect these programs. Most of the manpower required can be found in existing staff resources.

The following program presentation is broken down into two categories - programs for all areas and programs for remote and isolated areas. Many of these are not equally applicable in all centres. It is left to the discretion of individual school districts and schools to judge the effectiveness and applicability of programs for their particular situation.

The presentation of the programs begins with a problem statement. This consists of the identification of an area of concern for which remediation is potentially possible. The problem statement documents the situation and describes it with reference to the study findings. A policy or goal statement is then formulated for each of these areas.

For each problem statement, several mitigative programs are presented. These are discussed under the headings of program description, term of implementation and impact, effectiveness of the programs in mitigating against early school leaving, and resources and roles required for implementation. This discussion makes it fairly self-evident which programs are internal to the school system, which are external and which are a joint responsibility.

1.12.1 ALL AREAS

1.12.1.1 Awareness of the Early School Leaver Problem

Problem Statement

There is a general lack of awareness of the extent, characteristics and causes of the early leaver problem. Also there is a lack of knowledge about what to do to remediate the early school leaver situation. This lack of understanding and knowledge has resulted in a general lack of concern with the dropout. This is demonstrated in two ways;

- i) few intervention programs involving high risk students; and
- ii) little knowledge of the incidence of early school leavers in individual schools, in school districts, and in Alberta as a whole.

The first step to the solution of any problem is to create an awareness of its existence and its characteristics. Those who are involved can then fully appreciate the situation and learn how to deal with it.

Policy/Goal

The development and implementation of programs that involve creating an awareness of the early leaver and how to deal with the problem are desirable.

The objective of the following programs is to achieve this. The variety of workshops presented to accomplish this can be done individually, in combination or on a community or regional basis.

PROGRAM 1.A; Education Workshops

Set up a workshop package for educators. This would include all teachers from a community as well as central office personnel. The workshop would focus on study findings, developing an awareness of the problem, how to recognize at-risk students and especially how to minimize the incidence of early school leaving. This day-long workshop would, in essence, concentrate on an understanding of the mitigative programs and concentrate on the specific ideas appropriate for their schools. A very professionally prepared information package would be desirable for the workshop.

Term

The package should be prepared prior to the 1984-85 school year; the workshops should commence in October of 1984 and run throughout duration of the school year. It is anticipated that the impacts of this would be felt fairly immediately.

Effectiveness

Because this program is considered to be highly effective in mitigating against early school leaving, it should be the initial step in the implementation of all other programs.

Resources and Responsibilities

The workshop package preparation and the conduct of the workshop series should be done over a short, intensive time period. This program will require some limited funding. The responsibilities for the funds lie with all or a combination of the following; the Northern Alberta Development Council, Alberta Education, individual school boards, the Alberta School Trustees Association,

the Alberta Teachers' Association. Monitoring of the work in this area should be done by the steering committee set up for this particular project.

PROGRAM 1.B; School Board Workshops

Set up a workshop package for school trustees. The workshop would be presented to all of the school boards in the N.A.D.C. area. Similar to Program 1.A above, it should be aimed at fostering an awareness of the problems as well as describing the mitigative programs. In this workshop, more emphasis would be placed on budget options and program priorities, and their role in mitigating the problem would be emphasized. The workshops would be tailored to meet the individual needs of the community.

Term

The implementation of this should go hand in hand with that described in Program 1.A above. This should be undertaken fairly soon since the boards are ultimately responsible for budgets and policy. The impacts would likely be felt in the short run.

Effectiveness

It will be very effective as an initial step to the implementation of other programs.

Resources and Responsibilities

This is the same as that described for Program 1.A above since it should be done concurrently and constitute part of the same effort.

PROGRAM 1.C; Community/Parent Workshops

Set up and present workshops for local agencies, organizations and parents. Similarly the objectives would be to develop an awareness of the problem and emphasize the programs for remediation. The workshops would emphasize roles and responsibilities of these groups in the total process.

Term

This would be done at the same time as the workshops presented in the above two programs. Its impacts should also be felt fairly immediately.

Effectiveness

This program has the potential for being highly effective since it would emphasize the community's roles and responsibilities and how to interface with the school.

Resources and Responsibilities

The same as that described for Program 1.A above since it should be done concurrently.

PROGRAM 1.D; Students Workshop

Set up and present workshops to high school and junior high school students. A special workshop package would be prepared. The emphasis would be on developing an awareness of early school leaving, the consequences, the choices available and what can be done to improve the situation. At this time their participation in a local education committee would be introduced. (This is further discussed in the following Program 1.E). If this workshop with students can be successfully co-ordinated with some of their classroom programs i.e. Social, then it could be turned into an on-going learning experience.

This program might be called; "operation stay". The workshop would be the starting point of an on-going process of weekly announcements, posters, assembly presentations etc. focussing on the importance of remaining in school.

Term

This would be done in conjunction with the other programs presented above. Its impacts would likely be felt immediately.

Effectiveness

It is anticipated that this would be highly effective in reducing the drop-out rate since it would involve dealing directly with the population it is intended to help.

Resources and Responsibilities

This would be done concurrent with Programs 1.A and 1.C above and require the same level of resources.

PROGRAM 1.E; Local Education Committee

It is recommended that a committee be set up in each community. The committee would be comprised of students, teachers, parents and as an option it could have interagency representation. This committee would be charged with dealing with all aspects of the early school leaver problem. In addition it could be responsible for reviewing all aspects of student-teacher-parent-community interaction and welfare.

A manual on the structuring, responsibilities, and mandate of these committees would have to be prepared. It would have to very clearly delineate the limits of committee involvement in order that it not infringe on the domain of the school and school district. The general purpose of the committee would be to function in a manner that is complimentary and supplementary to the school.

For example two important initial tasks of this committee might be as follows:

- i) identify and review the local early school leaver problems and devise a plan for dealing with this at the community level;
- ii) review the whole area of parent-community-school involvement and develop a plan to enhance interaction.

Term

The establishment of these committees should be done immediately at the outset of the 1984-85 school year. The initial work with these can be done in conjunction with Programs 1.A to 1.D above. The impacts from the operation of this committee should be felt fairly quickly.

Effectiveness

If these committees are well structured and active, this program has the potential of being very highly effective in dealing with the problem of the dropout and in general with enhancing student welfare and parent-community-school interaction.

Resources and Responsibilities

The financial resources required to set up the committee structure and mandates would be fairly minimal and could be done as part of the overall program delivery described above. The responsibilities for ensuring that the committees existed, continued to function and were effective would have to be with the local boards, the schools, the students and the community at large.

PROGRAM 1.F; Monitoring System

It is recommended that a local early school leaver monitoring system be set up and that it feed directly into a broader provincial system. There are two options for doing this:

i) one is a technical computer based system. A full description of this follows in Section 3.5 of the report. This would be a centralized Alberta Education data system. It would be very comprehensive and cover the whole of the province. This system might take some time to implement and might not meet all of the local information requirements as identified by the local education committee;

ii) this approach is suggested as being interim and/or supplementary to the implementation of that mentioned above. This would be done

manually and aimed at getting a limited amount of information on new students and especially on those leaving. The local responsibility for data collection would belong to the school and/or local education committee. The format for data collection should be designed by a central agency and central agency monitoring should also be done.

Term

This should be set up and operationalized for the 1984-85 school year.

Effectiveness

This programs' value would be in providing a data base to measure the effectiveness of program implementation and it would help to maintain an awareness of the extent of the school leaving situation.

Resources and Responsibilities

The resources required in setting up this manual system are quite minimal and can be part of Programs 1.A to 1.E described above. The initiation could be done by the workshop group as part of the overall program. At some point in the future, Alberta Education will have to be involved with consolidation and co-ordination of the data and integrating this with a more technical, computer based system.

PROGRAM 1.G: Government and Central Agency Workshops

Government departments, primarily Alberta Education and Alberta Advanced Education, have a key role to play in the implementation of programs that will deal with mitigating against early school leaving. Similarly institutions, agencies and organizations that are centralized (i.e. A.T.A., A.S.T.A., University of Alberta) also have very important roles to play. It is recommended that workshops are presented to representatives of these groups. These would be aimed at fostering an awareness of the problem and its characteristics and specifically defining what their roles are in dealing with it.

Term

These should be conducted prior to the 1984-85 school year. The impacts on awareness would be fairly immediate.

Effectiveness

These should be fairly effective in achieving the desired objectives of developing an awareness of the problem and the roles of these agencies in dealing with it.

Resources and Responsibilities

The resources required for these workshops are fairly minimal. They should be initiated at the request of the government departments and agencies involved.

1.12.1.2 Student-Teacher RelationshipProblem Statement

There appears to be a lack of effective student-teacher relationships in northern schools. This does not imply that there are bad relationships. It rather suggests that they are lacking as desired. The evidence to support this is found in the results of the interviews that were conducted with students, parents, and community agencies and organizations.

It is interesting to note that 32% of the school leavers interviewed mentioned problems with teachers and administrators as a reason for leaving school early. This was the highest frequency response. Only 13% of students who left talked to their teachers about leaving prior to leaving, and 25% talked to administrators. Twenty eight percent said that better teachers would have been an inducement to staying in school. Twenty two percent of the leavers interviewed felt that teachers and administrators were most responsible for students dropping out of school and 59% rated teaching approaches as a very important reason for leaving school.

Twenty nine percent of the parents interviewed indicated better teachers as a way to improve the system for students. Twenty three percent of the parents felt teachers were most responsible for students leaving school, and 68% felt teaching approaches were a very important factor in early school leaving. Less than one half of the parents (46%) reported being contacted by the school after the decision to leave was made, and 64% said no one at the school attempted to help their child remain in school.

In all of the interviews conducted, the human, caring aspects of a teacher were considered to be the most desirable in an effective teacher. Similarly these were considered the most lacking in an ineffective teacher, with "not caring" the most frequently mentioned characteristic.

Forty percent of the community groups interviewed stated that they believe teachers and administrators are the second most responsible for students leaving school early; 19% say they are most responsible. Teaching approaches are rated by 65% of this group as a very important reason for early school leaving.

Of the high risk students surveyed, 21% identified problems with teachers and administrators as a reason for leaving school early. Twenty one percent of this group said they had considered leaving school because of problems with teachers and administrators. Better teachers were identified by 22% of high risk students as a factor that would encourage students to stay in school.

This information indicates a need for better student-teacher relationships. The lack of this relationship is clearly identified as a contributing factor to early school leaving. The creation and enhancement of good student-teacher relationships are also identified as having the potential to remediate against early school leaving.

Policy/Goal

Better student-teacher relationships are desirable in that they would create a better atmosphere for all students in the school. They would be especially

beneficial in encouraging some of the high risk students to stay in school longer. The development and implementation of programs which encourage this are required.

PROGRAM 2.A; Communication Skills

Provide teachers with instruction on how to achieve better communication skills in the classroom and with students in general. This could be accomplished partially through the implementation of the programs described in the previous problem area (i.e. Awareness of the Early School Leaver). Another method is for teachers to be required to take more courses in communications as part of their teacher training. This could be supplemented by a series of classroom communications seminars and workshops to be developed and implemented as a priority in-service training need.

Term

While work should begin soon in implementing this program, it is also realized that progress will only be achieved over the long run. Modification of teacher preparation programs will require time.

Effectiveness

This will be an effective program in improving student-teacher relationships and mitigating against early school leaving.

Resources and Responsibilities

The direct outlay of financial resources required for implementation of this program is minimal. A shift in priorities and activities is required. The responsibilities for implementation lie with the teachers for recognizing this need and personally working in this direction, the schools and school districts for in-service training, the A.T.A. for convention topics on this theme, and the university, for requiring more course work emphasis in this area.

PROGRAM 2.B; More Student Emphasis

There should be a shift toward a student emphasis in teaching rather than the current content emphasis. To effect this it is recommended that the schools move toward a homeroom, class-group type of system. In particular, this deals with the organization, administration and functioning of large composite schools in urban centres. In these schools, the homeroom system has been done away with, eliminating the students' sense of belonging to a class, grade or group. Students rotate rooms from subject area to subject area. This campus approach is not conducive to good relationships which students require all the way through the grade school system.

Term

Work in this direction should begin soon. Again it is realized that progress is likely to be slow because it involves changes in institutional organization. For that reason the impacts are likely not to be realized until the long term.

Effectiveness

The realization of better student-teacher relations through a greater emphasis on the student and a home room system should be very effective at keeping students in school. It should increase student-staff contact and provide opportunities for better communication.

Resources and Responsibilities

The budget implications of changing the organization of the large high schools would have to be determined. It is felt that the costs would not be too large. The responsibility for this lies primarily with the large schools and their districts.

PROGRAM 2.C; Smaller Size Schools

It is recommended that smaller schools be encouraged rather than continuing with the trend toward large composite schools.

A very large proportion (over 75%) of all people interviewed felt that the size of school affected the dropout rate. They indicated smaller schools would be more conducive to good student-teacher relationships. The development of smaller schools would also be beneficial in that it would shorten travel times to school and provide the schools with more of a community/neighbourhood base.

Therefore the development of new large composite high schools should be reviewed with an emphasis on student impact rather than program expediency.

Term

It is accepted that progress in this direction will be slow, since a change of this nature is something which can only be accomplished over time. Its impacts on early leavers will therefore only be in the long term.

Effectiveness

This should be quite effective at impacting on early leaver rates since students would have a better sense of belonging and more opportunities for personal contact with staff.

Resources and Responsibilities

If one of the main reasons for large composite schools is to economize on capital and operating costs, then this program would be expensive. The implementation of this is primarily the responsibility of individual school districts. It is also recognized that provincial funding programs have a great deal of influence over the size and numbers of high schools in a given region.

1.12.1.3 Recognizing the Value Of and Need for Education

Problem Statement

Students, especially the early leavers and high-risk students, often do not fully appreciate the value of education. They do not realize or accept the potential problems inherent in cutting short their grade school education. This may be especially true, and more critical, with some of the ethnic cultures in the north, both native and non-native. Not realizing the need, students are discouraged from staying in school.

This is partially reflected in the pattern in which the children leave school. Most (30%) leave after completing Grade 9, at a very young age when the full value of education is not realized. Also 31% state not being interested in school as a reason for leaving. This would tend to indicate that the value of what they are doing, and the benefits they are receiving are not realized.

Eighty one percent of the leavers interviewed indicated that if they had to do it again, they would choose to stay in school and tough it out. Sixty three percent said they would stay in because they realized education is important. Twenty seven percent of the high risk students interviewed said they decided to stay in school because they need schooling for a good job and 23% said they want to graduate. This demonstrates that an awareness of the value of education was lacking when the students left and that if it existed it would be an incentive to remain in school. Eighteen percent of leavers indicated that better career counselling would have helped to keep them in school.

Ninety two percent of leavers interviewed indicated they intend to get more education in the next five years. Of these, 50% had already taken courses or were back in school. This serves to demonstrate that, with this group, the value and need for education is realized to a large degree after they have left school.

Twenty three percent of educators interviewed felt that more counselling would help retain children in school. Eighty four percent indicated there are some

form of programs in their school that make students aware of the value of education and expose them to options available with further education. This varies considerably from a full scale program to a half-day film and talk session, to informal student-staff discussions. Seventy one percent of the educators felt that value of education programs and career counselling, if presented to all students, would be effective in reducing dropout rates.

Policy/Goal

A better appreciation of the value of education and the options it provides is beneficial in keeping students in school as an alternative to dropping out. The development and implementation of programs which promote this should be encouraged.

PROGRAM 3A; Career Counselling

A program of career counselling, which becomes part of the curriculum, should be developed for all schools. This should be compulsory for all students. Recognition of and provision for adaptation to unique local conditions should be provided in the program. Given that the highest frequency of dropouts (70%) occurs after the completion of Grade 9, this program should be introduced in Grade 7, at the latest, and run through to Grade 11.

Term

Work in introducing and developing this program as part of the curriculum should begin now. Its impacts would be felt in the short run.

Effectiveness

This program would be highly effective in assisting to reduce the dropout rate since it would increase students' awareness of career options and help them to make more responsible decisions about their future.

Resources and Responsibilities

The financial resources necessary for development and implementation of the program are quite minimal. The responsibility for its development and inte-

gration with the curriculum lies with Alberta Education. Local schools and school districts would be responsible for its adaptation to local conditions.

PROGRAM 3.B; Work Experience

It is recommended that work experience/local business involvement programs be developed. Similar to above, a standard model which forms part of the curriculum, yet has provisions for adaptation to local circumstances, should be developed. The emphasis for such a program should be with students who appear to be high-risk. The program should involve direct work experience with the local businesses as could be arranged for weekends, evenings and during school hours. There are many options available for developing and adapting. The local education committee could play a key role in its co-ordination and administration.

Term

The development and implementation of this program should begin soon. Its impacts will be felt quickly.

Effectiveness

It is felt that this program should be highly effective in helping reduce the incidence of early school leaving. It would focus on the learning of skills which would be particularly relevant to the students' local environment.

Resources and Responsibilities

The actual financial outlay required for development and implementation is minimal. Development of the working model should be the responsibility of Alberta Education. The local adaptation and implementation is the responsibility of the school district, the school, the local education committee and the community. This program has the added benefit of enhancing parent/community involvement in the school.

1.12.1.4 Relevance of Education

Problem Statement

The existing curriculum is not totally relevant to many of the local cultural and geographical conditions of the north. Education in Alberta is based upon North American educational philosophy which provides for equal opportunity for all in attaining their highest level regardless of their socio-economic, ethnic and religious background, or their location. The schools, which operationalize this philosophy, tend to be organized along the lines of white middle class values and customs. The views of others in society can differ with the "School System" regarding the importance and relevance of education. This is true in many areas of northern Alberta. This then results in an education which is largely irrelevant to many northern students.

Another aspect of this problem is the limit on the variety of subjects taught. For some students, the prescribed academic curriculum is not relevant to their wants and needs. Yet, for a variety of reasons, the academic subjects are the only ones offered.

Evidence to support the above can be found in the results of the interviews. When students (leavers, stayers and high risk) were asked if there were any subjects which were not offered in their schools which they would like to take, virtually all of those interviewed from the town and rural areas, said yes. Program areas identified with the highest frequency were vocational education, life skills programs, business education and local history and culture. Vocational education was mentioned the most consistently by all of the groups interviewed, including parents.

Forty one percent of the community group representatives who were interviewed said if the curriculum were improved it would make school more helpful for children. Fifty three percent of this group rated "courses being irrelevant" as a very important reason for students' leaving school. Thirty percent of the early leavers rated this very important, as did 29% of the parents, 34% of the stayers and 30% of the high risk students.

In response to questions about what could be done to reduce the incidence of early leavers, community representatives identified the need to adapt the education programs to better meet the needs of school children. They also suggested that education has to be geared to meet the cultural requirements of children and the curriculum has to be diversified to make it more interesting.

Seventy nine percent of the educators interviewed indicated there are courses not offered at their schools which potential leavers would like to take. Eighty six percent of these specified vocational education courses.

All of the above suggest that the curriculum is not totally relevant to the needs and circumstances of students in northern Alberta and that this is a contributing factor to the high incidence of early leavers in this area.

Policy/Goal

A curriculum review with the objectives of developing and implementing more relevant programs is required. The goals are to provide more options and more relevance to geography and culture in the provision of courses.

PROGRAM 4.A; Curriculum Review

A thorough review of the curriculum and its ability to meet local education needs should be undertaken. This review should deal with how relevant an academic stream is for students in schools that end prior to Grade 12 and where there is limited opportunity to go on. It should also examine how relevant the subject content is to local conditions. The review also has to consider that the academic option is valid for some students but not for others.

A task force comprised of northern educators and Alberta Education staff would be most effective in accomplishing this.

Term

The curriculum review should begin immediately. In recognition of the fact that this deals with changes in the basic philosophy of education, it is expected that changes in this area will not happen quickly. The impacts of this will therefore only be felt in the long term.

Effectiveness

If subject options can be provided which are relevant to the students' environment, then this should be highly effective in reducing the incidence of early leavers.

Resources and Responsibilities

Since this will be achieved only in the long term, additional resources necessary for its realization should not be great. The primary responsibility for this rests with Alberta Education and northern school districts.

PROGRAM 4.B; Adapt Subjects to Local Conditions

Vocational education/industrial art programs and courses are identified as being needed in many northern schools. In many cases these would provide the needed options for students who are not academically oriented and encourage them to stay in school. Alternative means of providing these programs and courses should be pursued. Some considerations in this area include the following:

- facility and program sharing among school boards;
- facility and program sharing with AVC's and CVS's;
- reducing the number of academic options in favour of these courses; and
- mobile education programs, facilities and teachers.

Term

This should be implemented as soon as possible. Its impacts on keeping high risk students in school would be immediate.

Effectiveness

It is felt that these programs would be highly effective at keeping students in school since this has been identified by many of those interviewed as a recommended subject.

Resources and Responsibilities

The initial responsibility rests with the individual school districts. Approval, in some cases, and assistance from Alberta Education would be required. Also, co-operation and assistance from Advanced Education, particularly AVC's and CVC's, would be necessary. The implementation of this program need not necessarily be expensive. Co-operation of local industry offers potential for defraying costs through a work combined experience program and making the programs very relevant to students.

1.12.1.5 Student Involvement

Problem Statement

The literature clearly points to lack of involvement in extra-curricular activities as being characteristic of the dropout. On the other hand, the student who stays is likelier to be involved and have a sense of belonging.

Programs that foster student involvement encourage the creation of a school environment that is exciting and pleasant for the children. During the field work phase of this study many schools were visited. Through the many interviews in the schools, the researchers were able to obtain a feeling for the school environments. It became quite obvious that schools with exciting environments which children enjoyed usually had programs that encouraged a lot of student participation.

Physical education is a very popular subject in schools. Thirty percent of the leavers identified it as a subject they liked while in school. Only 2% mentioned it as an unpopular subject. Similarly, 30% of the high risk students identified physical education as a liked subject as did 22% of stayers.

When asked what other things they liked about school, 44% of the leavers mentioned sports and 13% mentioned extra-curricular activities. Forty two percent of the high risk students indicated they like sports and 14% mentioned extra-curricular activities.

Fifty two percent of the leavers were involved as were 52% of the high risk students in extra-curricular activities. Of the stayers, 64% were involved in extra-curricular activities. This is substantially higher than for the other two groups.

All three student groups mentioned that more extra-curricular activities would make schools more interesting and encourage students to stay in school.

Policy/Goal

Programs which will encourage student involvement and participation should be promoted as a means of making school more interesting for students. The goals of these programs should be aimed at maximizing student involvement and participation.

PROGRAM 5.A; Sports Programs

It is recommended that sports programs be developed for all of the schools in the north. These programs should maximize participation and all students should be made to participate. Both parents and students should be involved in the planning and running of the programs. Sports programs should be implemented at all grade levels. Many successful models for this already exist which individual schools and districts could examine.

Term

These programs should be planned and implemented immediately. The beneficial impacts will be realized in the short term.

Effectiveness

This will be quite effective in reducing the incidence of early school leaving

as it has the combined potential of having the community, parents, students and teachers all working together.

Resources and Responsibilities

No major extra resources are required. The primary responsibility for this rests with the teachers and administrators in individual schools. They must recognize the importance of this program and spend time outside of the classroom working to make it happen. The responsibility will also rest with the community and with the students.

PROGRAM 5.B; Field Programs

It is recommended that all schools have a well planned field program. This is especially important given the relative isolation of northern Alberta. The program should be planned well in advance. Field trips which access the academic, cultural and economic centres outside of northern Alberta should be planned throughout the year.

Term

Where such a program is not currently available, implementation should start in the immediate future. Its effectiveness in contributing to the total school atmosphere should be fairly noticeable over the short term.

Effectiveness

Its effectiveness will be in combination with other programs to enhance the students' sense of belonging and the school spirit. As such it should have a good impact on the dropout rate.

Resources and Responsibilities

Extra financial resources are usually required for field trips. These are most often obtained through community fund-raising activities. The responsibility for this rests initially with the teachers, the school and the school system. The students and parents then have an important role to play in the planning, implementation and support of these.

PROGRAM 5.C; Student Government

The system of student government should be reviewed in the schools and modified or implemented as necessary. Some form of student government should exist in all schools at all grade levels. The government should not just be for an elected few but should maximize student participation. For example there may be a central government with various student committees e.g. sports committee, field program committee, clubs committee, community relations committee, etc. School staff should provide a clear mandate for the functioning of student government and then be involved only to provide the guidance necessary for its set-up and operation. A manual on student government which provides a model and mandate description should be developed.

To be most meaningful it will be important that all students be co-opted in the governmental process. The at risk student who may become a leaver should be strongly encouraged by teachers and peers to become involved. High levels of student participation should be rewarded. Extreme care must be taken to avoid making this become exclusive for the high achievers.

Term

This should be done in the immediate future. Its impact will be felt extensively and quickly.

Effectiveness

Its effectiveness will be felt in its overall contribution to school atmosphere. If successfully implemented to include under-achievers and high risk students, it should have a tremendous impact on early leaver rates by encouraging better student relations and a sense of belonging to a school community.

Resources and Responsibilities

The extra resources required are minimal. The responsibility for implementing this lies with the school teachers and administrators. The manual should be

prepared by Alberta Education. If well structured and run, this would help shift some staff responsibility to the students.

1.12.1.6 Community/School Involvement

Problem Statement

At present most schools are used very little outside of daytime school hours. The community has little use for the space. Community residents, including parents, are a bit in awe of the school yet a need for more direct parent/community involvement in the schools was identified fairly strongly in the surveys.

Seventy percent of the educators who were interviewed indicated there is some parent-community involvement in their schools. Thirty percent say there essentially is none. Those who identify some involvement say it consists of some form of PTA, working through normal school channels, or parents' volunteering to help with some school activities. Eighty two percent feel that more involvement would help reduce student dropout rates. Forty three percent of these say that this should be done by selling parents on the value of education and removing the fear of school. Twenty nine percent of educators say there should be direct involvement of parents in school policy.

Parent and community involvement with the school was strongly supported (78%) by the parents interviewed. As ways to get involved they suggested more parent-teacher contacts (27%), attending PTA meetings (41%), parent volunteers (23%) and parent aides (14%).

Representatives from community groups identified a need for everybody in the community to get involved with education. They suggested that the involvement of parents would show the children they care about them, demonstrate the importance of education and influence students towards caring about school and education themselves.

It is clear that parent-community involvement with the schools in the north is not adequate. Most people interviewed felt that more of this involvement

would help reduce student dropout rates.

Policy/Goals

It is recommended that schools become community schools in the true sense of the word and that programs to encourage more parent-community involvement with the school be developed. A program of parent-community involvement should be geared towards all residents of the community.

PROGRAM 6.A; Plan Community Involvement

Schools and communities should undertake a thorough review of parent-community involvement in each centre. This should be a function of the local education committee or done through a task force set up by them. A manual which lays out the method of evaluations, the objectives of community involvement, and means of achieving this should be developed for distribution in all communities. A plan for achieving the desired involvement should then be drawn up and implemented at the community level. The unique characteristics of each centre will have to be reflected in the plan.

Term

The manual should be prepared now and the review and plan developed during the 1984-85 school year. This should be effective in the medium term since it will take a while for development, implementation and the beneficial effects to be felt by the potential leavers.

Effectiveness

Its effectiveness will be realized in combination with other related programs. It will also be a bit slower because, as pointed out by educators, the parents that you really want to talk to are the ones who never show up. Some teachers may also be reluctant to share responsibilities with parents.

Resources and Responsibilities

The extra resources required for the implementation of this plan are minimal.

Responsibility for the manual preparation lies with Alberta Education. The review, plan development, and implementation is the joint responsibility of the school, the community, the students and the parents.

PROGRAM 6.B; Schools Promote Community Involvement

The teachers and the schools should encourage more events that promote community-parent-school contacts. The occasional parent-teacher interviews are not sufficient. A review of these programs should be undertaken in each school and a planned approach worked out. This should be for all grades in all schools. Suggestions in this area include the following:

- more frequent parent-teacher interviews;
- an active local school committee;
- parent contacts that do not deal exclusively with negative behaviour in crisis situations but also contacts for positive behaviour;
- parents' day at the school (to attend with students);
- teacher home visits with the student present, for all grade levels;
- extensive use of parent volunteers to assist, not replace, teaching staff; and
- active promotion of the local education committee.

This should be planned to include all parents, not just those who are consistently involved.

Term

This should be implemented immediately. The impacts will be felt in the medium term through changing attitudes towards the school.

Effectiveness

This will be effective in impacting on early leaver rates as parental and community attitudes toward the school are gradually changed.

Resources and Responsibilities

No extra resources are required for implementation of this program. The

primary responsibility rests with teachers and with school administration staff. Policy directions and central office assistance would also help to effect this.

PROGRAM 6.C; Community School

School facilities should not be used only for teaching students during the day. The school's physical plant should be treated as a community facility in the sense that the buildings are a community asset to be used by the community. Evening use for all kinds of activities by adults and students should be encouraged. As space permits, these activities should be encouraged during the day. This includes adult education, C.V.C. and A.V.C. courses, special seminars and sessions and different community meetings and activities. Rather than building new separate facilities in a community, additions to the schools' physical plant would often be more logical. This would serve to make the school a more important focal point in the community, remove the fear of schools, and, through a joint adult-student sharing of facilities, positively change the student's impression of school.

Term

The implementation of this should begin now and be encouraged to develop over time. The impacts on early school leavers will be felt in the medium term.

Effectiveness

This program's effectiveness will be felt in combination with other programs, as community involvement with the school environment is gradually increased.

Resources and Responsibilities

The extra resources required are very minimal. This will be accomplished through an initiative taken by the school and the school district. Community agencies and organizations will then have to become involved.

1.12.1.7 The Student At Risk

Problem Statement

It appears that the education system, as it is currently administered, does not recognize and deal effectively with the students who drop out of school. The focus and the teaching orientation is on the student who will make it through the system.

This lack of recognition is demonstrated through the data gathering difficulties that were experienced during the course of this study. Many schools could not readily identify their early leavers and very few schools had any methods of dealing with students whom they suspected would drop out. There are no definite intervention programs that recognize high risk students and try to work with those students to help them continue with their education.

In order to implement programs in this area, it will be necessary for teachers and schools to recognize that they are losing over 50% of their students.

Policy/Goal

Programs that recognize the at risk student, intervene and help him/her continue with their education are necessary. These programs should not be implemented at the sacrifice of those who are making it through the system but rather for the benefit of all students in the schools.

PROGRAM 7.A; Dealing With the Potential Early Leaver

Due to the importance of dealing with the at risk student, a planned consistent approach should be developed. This approach will have to recognize the unique environmental differences of different localities, the variation in availability of resources and subject options, and the grade levels of the schools. A school and teachers' manual should be prepared which should describe the characteristics of the at risk student and provide a model of alternative ways to deal and intervene with these students. The model preparation should include a review of the feasibility of establishing a

teacher committee at the school level. This teacher committee would be charged with reviewing each individual potential leaver case and recommending a course of action. Where desirable, an interagency approach might be used with an individual student. Each potential leaver should have one counsellor (teacher) to work with in the school.

Term

The manual should be prepared immediately and the implementation of the program should occur in all schools in the 1984-85 school year. The impacts of this will be felt as soon as implementation occurs.

Effectiveness

If well implemented, this program has the potential of being highly effective in reducing the incidence of early school leavers since direct contact and intervention will be made with those students who have the greatest potential for leaving.

Resources and Responsibilities

The preparation of the manual would be the responsibility of Alberta Education. The implementation at the school level is the joint responsibility of teachers, school administrators and district office. Other agencies should be consulted and where desirable should share a role in working with these students.

PROGRAM 7.B: Life Skill Programs

In recognizing that there are at risk students who will become early leavers, non-academic program options should be provided to better prepare them for life outside of school. There are various reasons why students drop out of school. Some of these, such as lack of a high school program, make it impossible for a student not to drop out. Life skills courses in lieu of academic programs should be provided for many of these students to give them a better preparation for life than they are getting now.

Term

Life skill courses should be introduced as quickly as it is logistically possible to do so. They will benefit the students as they are able to take these courses, and may have some long-term benefit in reducing the social impacts of school leaving.

Effectiveness

This program will have very little impact on reducing dropout rates since it is aimed primarily at those who will be leaving. It will, however, provide better, more relevant education for many students.

Resources and Responsibilities

The resources necessary for this depend on the schools and the extent of the courses that will be implemented. This is the responsibility of school districts and individual schools.

PROGRAM 7.C; Transfer to A.V.C.'s and C.V.C.'s

Students who have made a decision that the academic stream is not for them and have no vocational education options available in their schools should, if possible, be transferred to C.V.C.'s and A.V.C.'s. This also applies to students who cannot readily cope with the rigidity of the grade school system. A preferable alternative for them would be to go to a C.V.C. or A.V.C. rather than dropping out. The school and C.V.C. or A.V.C. facility would have to interface directly to enable the student to transfer his program of studies rather than drop out.

The logistics of this program are discussed more fully under Program 8.A which follows.

Term

This should be implemented soon. Its impact will be felt immediately upon implementation.

Effectiveness

This will be very effective in reducing the incidence of early school leavers since it provides relevancy and variety in school programs which were requested by students and parents.

Resources and Responsibilities

The extra resources necessary for this program will vary considerably depending upon the extent of the program. This could range from minimal to a considerable amount. The responsibilities for this program rest primarily with the individual school districts, schools, and teachers. The assistance of Advanced Education through the C.V.C.'s and A.V.C.'s will be necessary.

PROGRAM 7.D; School Sabbatical

It is recognized that, regardless of the extent of prevention and intervention, some students will leave, for a variety of reasons. Several things are possible to help these students; the life skills programs previously discussed will assist as will giving them a manual on how to apply for a job. It is recommended that some students who are dropping out be granted a "sabbatical" from school. This would require the student being assigned a school staff advisor that he/she would contact on a regular basis. This form of counselling would assure that the students kept their options open. They could then really freely decide if leaving is their preferred course of action. The sabbatical will facilitate and encourage the return of many students.

Term

This should be implemented immediately. Its benefits will be realized in the short term.

Effectiveness

This would not have an impact on the incidence of early leaving as measured by students dropping out in any given year. However it would bring many of

the leavers back and help them to have another chance at their schooling.

Resources and Responsibilities

Its implementation will not require any additional resources beyond some of the teachers' and school administrators' time. The responsibility lies with the teachers, school administrators and school districts.

1.12.1.8 Schooling After Incomplete Grade School

Problem Statement

Most of the leavers interviewed (92%) indicated that they intend to get more education in the next five years. Forty four percent of these said that they would take vocational education and 24% said they would return to school. Fifty percent had taken at least one course since they had dropped out of school. Forty one percent of those had taken vocational education.

The above data indicate that there is a strong desire on the part of the vast majority of early school leavers to further their education. Several students expressed that they found it difficult to go back to school after leaving. The reasons they gave were that they lost touch with the system, they really did not know how to come back, they felt like they were not wanted around the school, or they simply felt ashamed because they hadn't made it through the system.

Most of the dropouts occur prior to grade 11 and over 50% of the students who drop out are under 18 years of age. Strictly speaking, 15 and 16 year old dropouts have no other educational institutions to attend since the C.V.C's and A.V.C.'s are adult education institutions that require a person to be 18 years of age or more.

Policy/Goal

Returning to school in any of Alberta's education institutions should be made easier for those who have left the grade school system. Programs which

encourage and facilitate students' returning should be developed and implemented.

PROGRAM 8.A; C.V.C./A.V.C. Interface With School Districts

The A.V.C.'s and C.V.C.'s should interface directly with the grade school system to provide for the education of those who drop out. Several facets of this interface have been discussed in previous programs. Other are identified here.

A.V.C.'s and C.V.C.'s seem to be operating at capacity now and fairly long waiting lists are common. Capacity in these institutions should be expanded according to need.

The A.V.C.'s and C.V.C.'s might contract with the school districts to offer courses or teach groups of students. This would help dropouts who return to take courses. They could take courses simultaneously through both institutions. It would serve to complement the grade school course offerings.

The 18 year age restriction for enrollment in A.C.C.'s and C.V.C.'s should be removed. This would serve to eliminate the "no-man's land" of lack of education alternatives for the dropout who is less than 18 years of age.

Term

Implementation of this program should begin as soon as possible. Its impacts on early leavers will be felt co-incidental with its implementation.

Effectiveness

This program is important in providing education alternatives for the young early leaver. It would be effective in providing a specific avenue for students to return to school.

Resources and Responsibilities

The capacity expansion portion of this program will be expensive. Contracting courses with school systems will require some extra resources but not an excessive amount. Lowering the age limit can be done simply but would not be very effective unless capacity for these students is available. Advanced Education would be responsible for the implementation of this program. School and school district co-operation and co-ordination would also be necessary.

1.12.1.9 Busing and Boarding

Problem Statement

It is interesting to note that the distance of the school from the home was seldom identified as a major reason for students' dropping out. Sixty nine percent of the early leavers interviewed rated this as an unimportant reason. Similarly 65% of the parents, 71% of community group representatives, 60% of high risk students, and 70% of stayers indicated this as an unimportant reason.

Seventy one percent of the leavers interviewed had taken the bus to school at one time or another in their school life. Their bus rides ranged from 30 minutes one way to two hours. This compares to the stayers' sample where 63% rode the bus. This also demonstrates that bus rides are common and often fairly long in northern Alberta.

The parents, teachers, and community representatives are all fairly unanimous in indicating that long bus rides are detrimental to children's staying in school and performing well. The reasons they give are that it makes the students tired, lethargic and bored. Bus students can't participate in extra-curricular activities and are not part of the school community. Some children in the north have bus rides in excess of two hours one way. Very few adults would accept four hours per day of commuting.

All those interviewed are fairly unanimous in saying that boarding out generally does not work. They indicate that experience has shown repeatedly that children do not meet with success in the schools, can't adapt easily to life away from their homes and communities, and ultimately end up going back home.

Policy/Goal

Bus rides must be shortened wherever possible to allow these children to lead a more normal life similar to that of other school children. Alternatives to boarding should be pursued. Where there are none, a better boarding environment should be encouraged.

PROGRAM 9.A; School Decentralization

It is recommended that schools reverse their trend of centralization and go in the direction of decentralization. This will serve several objectives, all favourable to encouraging students to stay in school longer. It will shorten bus rides, encourage smaller schools, put schools back in the community and result in an overall better student-community-parent-teacher atmosphere.

Term

It is recognized that this can only be implemented in the long run. Its impacts will be realized in the long term.

Effectiveness

This will be very effective in helping reduce the rate of early school leavers since it will provide more favourable conditions for students and school-student contact.

Resources and Responsibilities

Since this calls for the construction of more schools it will require more funding. However, the exact extent is not defined since there is a trade-off

with busing costs. This program is primarily the responsibility of school districts. It is recognized that the province shares a role through the provision of funds.

PROGRAM 9.B; Boarding

Where there are no alternatives to boarding out, particularly pending implementation of some other programs, a more compatible boarding situation must be found. This would mean providing prior orientation for the students to the school and centre they will be attending, having a group home that would include other children from their community, and having house parents that understood the culture and could devote time to helping these children in their adjustment. The school and teachers should also be made aware of the background of the students to help facilitate their adjustment.

Term

This should be implemented as soon as possible. Its impacts will be felt immediately.

Effectiveness

It should be quite effective in reducing dropout rates, particularly in Northland School Division where problems associated with boarding are a critical issue.

Resources and Responsibilities

The extra resources required for this on an on-going basis will be somewhat greater than under the current home boarding system. This program should be a joint responsibility of the school, the parents and the community in general. The province also has a role in fulfilling its responsibility in contributing to the provision of education opportunities for all.

1.12.2 Remote and Isolated Areas

1.12.2.1 High Teacher Turnover Rates

Problem Statement

In remote and isolated areas there is a high rate of teacher turnover. This results in a generally lowered level of educational services. In Northland School Division the teacher turnover rate is approximately 2.5 years compared to an approximate average of six years for the province as a whole. A community leader in one of the remote settlements indicated that they seldom get good teachers. Young inexperienced teachers come to the settlement, and after a couple of years, when they start knowing the community, feeling comfortable, and being effective teachers, they leave.

This situation discourages children from staying in schools, as good teacher-student relationships are difficult to achieve under these circumstances. As previously discussed, problems with teachers and administrators and a lack of positive student-teacher relationships are identified frequently as an important reason why students leave school. This is supported by the following data.

Twenty three percent of parents interviewed felt that teachers were most responsible for students' leaving school early. Sixty eight percent felt that teaching approaches were a very important reason for students' leaving school early.

Thirty one percent of the educators interviewed rated problems with teachers and administrators as a reason for students' leaving school early. Twenty percent of the educators identified being able to relate to the community as a unique characteristic of an effective teacher in northern Alberta. Sixteen percent said better student-teacher relations would reduce the incidence of early leaving.

The high teacher turnover rates relate directly to the factors identified above. Programs that increase the length of teachers' stay will be effective in providing a better school atmosphere.

Policy/Goal

Teachers should be encouraged to stay longer in the communities in which they teach. Programs aimed at reducing turn-over rates should be implemented to retain the potentially effective teachers.

PROGRAM 10.A; Teacher Paid Sabbatical

Set up a system of paid sabbatical leave for teachers in remote and isolated communities. There are many options for operationalizing such a program. For example, eligibility might come after three years, or after six years. The sabbatical might be for one year or for six months. The program could also vary depending on the degree of community isolation. It could be partially based on merit. The specific details would have to be worked out through consultation with school boards and school district representatives and would probably vary from district to district.

Term

These programs would take approximately one year to develop. They could be ready for implementation in the 1986-87 school year. Their impacts should be felt in the medium term, five year period.

Effectiveness

It is felt that this program would be quite effective in reducing drop-out rates by providing an incentive for teachers to remain in the northern communities.

Resources and Responsibilities

The development of the program would be relatively inexpensive but its implementation could be costly. This would depend on the nature and extent of the programs. A portion of the costs would be off-set through cost reductions associated with teacher recruitment, teacher orientation and other staff turnover costs. A cost-benefit study done on various alternatives might show

that these are not too expensive. This program area is primarily the responsibility of the school district.

PROGRAM 10.B; Student Teaching

Student teachers at the University of Alberta should be encouraged to take their practicum in remote and isolated communities. There are many options for this program. It would have to be developed jointly by the University and the participating school boards. This program would foster a better appreciation of teaching and living in these communities.

Term

It could be implemented during the 1985-86 school year. Its impacts would be felt in the short-term.

Effectiveness

Through such a program, new teachers would be better prepared for teaching in northern schools, and the better teacher-student understandings which would result would be effective in reducing early school leaver rates.

Resources and Responsibilities

The costs of this program can vary considerably depending on the nature of the program and the degree of participation by the individual school districts. This should be a joint northern school board and University of Alberta undertaking with both sides sharing the provision of necessary resources.

PROGRAM 10.C; Teacher Orientation

Teacher orientation to the schools and local conditions they will face, should be improved. This can be achieved through a co-operative school district, community and local school effort. There are various ways of doing this. One of these would be to bring the prospective employee to the community prior to being offered or accepting a teaching position. Then,

through a co-ordinated effort, expose the person to the community and school as it actually exists and operates. If, in some cases, this is difficult, then a film/photo presentation on the community should be prepared along with a description of local conditions. This should be a realistic portrayal of community life showing both the positive and negative aspects of the school and the community.

Term

This should be in place for the 1985-86 school year. Its effects would be felt in the short term.

Effectiveness

This would result in teachers arriving in the communities with a more positive attitude. They would not experience a feeling of deception or surprise at the beginning of the school year. This would be translated into better teacher-community and teacher-student relations and, therefore, would be quite effective in helping reduce the incidence of early leaving.

Resources and Responsibilities

This program would require a bit of work in setting up and administering. The actual dollar costs would not be too high. The initiative for this would have to come from the local school board office and the effort co-ordinated with the community and the school.

1.12.2.2 Teacher Preparation

Problem Statement

Most teachers in the north, particularly in the remote and isolated areas, received no special preparation for teaching in a unique geographical and cultural setting. This relates very closely to the lack of good student-teacher relationships which are discussed above.

Educators identified the following as characteristics of an effective teacher in northern Alberta: must relate to the community (20%); accept other cultures (35%); and be self-confident, self-reliant and independent (48%). Eighty six percent of those interviewed stated they did not receive any special training for teaching in the north.

When asked how they could better be prepared they indicated the following: a realistic orientation to the situation they will face (39%); exposure to northern and native culture in study programs (33%); and local student teaching (20%).

It would appear that prospective teachers are mostly ignorant of the circumstances which they will face when they go to teach in the north. Their teacher training does not prepare them for the teaching situations which they will face. This tends to make teachers, at least initially, less effective than they should be. They are simultaneously trying to cope with living in a new environment and teaching to an audience which they do not yet understand or appreciate.

This results in a lack of good student-teacher relationships. It also contributes to the high rate of teacher turnover, and consequently relates directly to the high incidence of early leaving.

Policy/Goal

Teachers need to be better prepared to teach in different geographical and cultural settings. It is also necessary that they have a good understanding of the cultural groups which they will teach. Programs which foster this must be developed and implemented.

PROGRAM 11.A; Cultural Education

Teachers with an interest in northern teaching should pursue a program of studies that emphasizes cultural education. This necessitates two things. The current program at the University of Alberta, Department of Education,

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should be reviewed for its adequacy in meeting cultural education requirements as they apply very specifically to northern Alberta native cultures. The second is that the students must be made aware of an education option which specializes in native and northern education.

Term

Work in this direction should begin now. It is realized that a major program change at the university will take a long time to effect. The effects of this will be long term.

Effectiveness

This will be very effective in providing better quality education for northern students. It will ultimately aid in reducing dropout rates.

Resources and Responsibilities

The university is responsible for recognizing the need for this program and offering the relevant courses. The resources necessary should not be substantial since it can likely be accomplished through a shift in course offerings.

PROGRAM 11.B; English as a Second Language

Primary grade teachers in a school where there is a high native enrollment should be trained in teaching English as a second language. Currently many of these children begin school speaking only their native language. The teacher is not prepared to deal with this situation effectively and the students' first exposure to the classroom is one of frustration and failure. Where it is not possible to have properly trained teachers, a native teacher aid should be in the classroom.

Term

This program should be implemented now. It is realized that it will take some time to become extensive. Its impacts will therefore only be felt in the medium to long term.

Effectiveness

Its implementation will be effective in providing students with a more successful primary grade experience. When you consider the high primary grade retention rate among natives and the fact that 80% of those who fail in the primary grades never make it to Grade 12, then this should be highly effective in reducing the dropout rate.

Resources and Responsibilities

The hiring of properly trained teachers for primary grades would not require extra resources if done over time. Putting native teacher aids in all primary grades would require considerable extra resources. The responsibility for effecting this rests with the school boards and the individual schools.

PROGRAM 11.C; Integrate Teacher Housing

Teachers in northern communities tend to live apart from the community. An expression used to describe the housing for teachers in these communities is; "the compound". These are often fenced, stand apart from other community housing and are structurally different from most community housing. This sets the teachers aside as being different. It discourages their becoming part of the community. Staff housing should be integrated with community housing. This would foster better teacher-community relations, provide the teachers with a better understanding of those they teach, and show the students the more human side of their teachers.

Term

This should begin now, to be realized slowly over time as more housing is introduced and replaced. Its impacts will be felt in the long run.

Effectiveness

Its effectiveness in reducing dropout rates will be moderate. This will however serve to improve teacher dealings with the community.

Resources and Responsibilities

If done gradually over time no extra resources will be required to introduce this plan. The responsibility for this rests with the school districts, the schools and the teachers.

1.12.2.3 Teaching System

Problem Statement

Native children tend to have high primary grade failure rates. As evidenced in the literature, 80% of students who fail in the primary grades never make it through school. The data from this study show that early leavers who are retained three or four years are more likely to be native than caucasian. Of all the early leavers who only failed one grade, 39% were native and 51% were caucasian. For two years of retention, 43% are native and 57% caucasian. For three years, 81% are native and 18% are caucasian. For four years, 70% are native and 25% are caucasian.

The high native failure rates are a result of many factors: curriculum relevance; schools not being adapted to native customs and traditions; low value of education among natives; teachers not prepared to teach natives; and the administration of the education system. The suggestions identified here deal only with system concerns.

The philosophy of education for northern remote communities must be reviewed. Very fundamental, basic questions need to be answered. Should education for natives in these locations be aimed at making the student competitive with the urban dweller? Should education be aimed at providing basic skills in the three R's and then concentrate on what is more relevant to the native students' culture and environment? Or does the answer lie some place in between the two extremes?

Policy/Goal

Where possible, the administration of the education system should be modified to better meet local conditions in remote and isolated areas. The objective is to provide a more meaningful type of education for the people.

PROGRAM 12.A; Philosophy of Education

It is recommended that the philosophy of education for all remote and isolated communities be identified. It would basically answer the questions that were raised above. The school should act only as a catalyst. The local community boards and the community, in general, should develop this philosophy. To prepare the community to do this, it is suggested that a mobile specialist team go into each community. They would teach the boards and the community how to use their own resources to develop this philosophy. Coincidentally this team could teach the community what the school is all about and how to interface with it. It would also teach the school staff how to interface with the community. The school board and the school would then have the responsibility of translating this philosophy into courses and programs for the students.

Term

This should begin as soon as possible. Its effects will be felt in the medium term since it will likely take some time to ultimately translate the philosophy to programs and courses.

Effectiveness

Achieving this will require considerable human resources and some financial aid. The financial requirements will be the responsibility of the school system. The local boards and the community, as well as the school, will have a very important role to play in defining the philosophy and translating it into specific subject areas.

PROGRAM 12.B; Primary Grade Failures

Northern school boards should seek to find and implement, at least at the primary levels, an alternate system to the pass-fail-repeat system. A logical alternative is a unit-continuous promotion system where a student progresses continuously, unit by unit, according to level of preparedness and ability. No repetition is ever necessary.

Term

Selecting an alternate system and implementing it should begin immediately. It is realized that this will take some time to effect and the impacts will only be felt in the medium to long term.

Effectiveness

This will be highly effective in reducing the negative school experience associated with retention and will therefore help keep children in school longer.

Resources and Responsibilities

This is the responsibility of the school system. Alberta Education might assist in the selection or development of a successful program.

PROGRAM 12.C; Pre-School Programs

As evidenced by the high failure rate, many of these students are not ready to begin school. It is recommended that, in co-operation with the school and the community, pre-school programs be introduced in all communities where they don't currently exist.

Term

This should be implemented as soon as possible. Its impacts will be felt in the short to medium term.

Effectiveness

This will be highly effective at better preparing children for entering school, reducing primary grade lack of success and ultimately encouraging students to stay in school longer.

Resources and Responsibilities

The implementation of pre-school programs can be fairly expensive. The responsibilities for implementation lie jointly with the school, the

community, the school district, and the province. The funding should come primarily from the province.

1.12.2.4 One School to Grade 12

Problem Statement

This is a self-evident problem. As an example out of 26 schools, Northland School Division has only one high school. Most of the other schools terminate at Grade 7, 8 or 9. These centres are too far for busing students to higher level schools in other centres and many are not accessible by road. The only two remaining alternatives are boarding out and correspondence. In the interviews, parents, educators, and community group representatives were unanimous in saying that correspondence does not work. They also say that boarding seldom works. The result is that most of these children do not have the opportunity to continue their education.

This is a very serious problem. It accounts for the vast majority of early school leavers in remote and isolated areas. For a variety of reasons, mostly related to funding restrictions and an unwillingness to go with split-grade, multi-subject classrooms, children in remote and isolated areas are being denied the opportunity of an education that other children in other parts of the province have.

Policy/Goal

The school systems and Alberta Education should implement programs aimed at assuring that all students in all parts of the province have equal opportunity for education.

PROGRAM 13.A; Multi-Subject, Multi-Grade Classrooms

Re-introduce the concept of small high schools and of having several grades and several subjects taught by one teacher in one classroom e.g. grades 10 to 12 combined. The responsibility for this could be shared by several teachers from all grade levels. Therefore all of the specialist

areas would be covered. History provides an excellent example of the effective working of this system and it would not unduly burden one teacher.

Term

This should be implemented as soon as possible. Its impacts will be immediate.

Effectiveness

This will be highly effective in reducing the incidence of early school leavers by providing educational opportunities which are more readily available to students in remote and isolated areas.

Resources and Responsibilities

This could be fairly expensive in that extra staff and facilities will be required. The school system will be responsible for its implementation and administration. The province is responsible for the funding.

PROGRAM 13.B; Mobile Education

Mobile education was strongly identified by those interviewed as a workable alternative. It could provide education in certain subject areas in a cost-effective manner. This is especially true for subjects that can't easily be taught in some schools i.e. vocational education subjects. Mobile education can be used in combination with the format described in Program 13.A to provide instruction in specific subject areas. It is recommended that models for mobile education be reviewed and implemented. C.V.C. and A.V.C. co-operation may have potential in this area.

Term

This should be done in the immediate future. Its impacts will be felt in the short-run.

Effectiveness

This will be highly effective in furthering the education of students in remote and isolated areas by providing them with increased educational opportunities which are readily accessible.

Resources and Responsibilities

The resources required for this are considerable. The needs identification and implementation is the responsibility of the school districts and schools. The funding and teaching of programs is the responsibility of Alberta Education and Advanced Education. Some of the program offerings can be contracted through the C.V.C.'s and A.V.C.'s.

